



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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BATON ROUGE – On Nov. 15, a gas well exploded and caught fire barely 100 yards from Interstate 10 near Ramah. Emergency responders rushed to the scene and an elevated portion of I-10 between Lafayette and Baton Rouge was shut down because of the ensuing flames and possible explosions.

The Department of Environmental Quality participated in the State Police incident command center in the early hours by taking air samples to ensure the safety of emergency responders. Since then, a complex air-monitoring network has been established to gather air quality data for historical recordkeeping. This will verify a safe working environment and monitor for any changes that would impact air quality. Two air monitors were set up on the closed portion of the interstate close to the fire. These monitors provide real-time, air-quality data to the incident command center located several miles away in Ramah. Additional monitors have been strategically placed around the site. Data from these sites are collected and downloaded into a computer on an hourly basis.

Besides air quality, water quality is a big environmental concern for the department. More than 500 gallons per minute of water is being pumped from giant jet water hoses onto the burning well head. The potential for water runoff into the nearby swampy area was of primary concern. So, DEQ took background samples of the existing area waters. Contractors then built a six-acre retention pond that averages about three feet deep to intercept the fire water runoff. Contractors will be taking water samples of the waters in this retention pond every 30 minutes. DEQ is prepared to take water samples of any potential runoff from this retention pond.

“We have been fortunate thus far with no serious impact to the environment,” said Jeffrey Meyers, Division Administrator. “There have been no issues with the air quality since the fire began. This has been confirmed by ongoing air monitoring. The newly constructed retention ponds are also working as planned. All water runoff is being collected for disposal. We are prepared to perform the necessary water sampling if water discharge becomes an issue. Environmentally, this incident has thus far been appropriately managed.”

DEQ is prepared to provide 24-hour environmental monitoring until the well head is capped and there are no more leaks. The department will also maintain a 24-hour presence at the incident command post until this incident is terminated.

Photographs and video of the site are available at www.deq.louisiana.gov.

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